

The recent tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL has raised many questions and concerns about the safety of our children in our nation's schools. At Lakota Schools, the safety and security of our students and staff is our number one priority. Always.

Over the last several weeks, we have been contacted by many parents and community members who have questions about security measures in Lakota. Some aspects of our district security plan are visible to the public, while others are not.

Visitors will notice the upgraded safe and secure entrances at our buildings and the protocols in place before being allowed to enter. The number of School Resource Officers (SRO) in our district has increased from three to 10 in the past years. These SROs are uniformed members of the Butler County Sheriff's Office and West Chester Police Department. Their presence encourages relationships to be built between the students and officers, making them another trusted adult in the lives of our students.

Our students and staff members participate in many different types of safety drills throughout the school year. These include fire and tornado drills, but also what to do should an intruder enter the building. Lakota Schools uses ALICE training, which stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. Intruder training includes different scenarios based on ALICE. Additionally, other safety drills occur throughout the year, an example of which would be K-9 searches of hallways and lockers.

The safety and security of our students also includes their health and well-being, including mental health. We are working to meet the social and emotional needs of our students and we continue to improve our mental health services. We have partnered with Mindpeace, which is a non-profit advocate for access to high quality mental healthcare. Programs began at Lakota West earlier this school year, and are expanding to Lakota East now. This partnership will also be in all of our junior schools by next year. Hope Squads, through the non-profit organization Grant Us Hope, are coming to our high schools as well. These peer-to-peer suicide prevention groups encourage our students to "see something, say something" when they are concerned about one of their fellow students.

We, as a community, need to be engaged in the lives of our children. Be the confidant, the trusted adult who they are able to talk to. Encourage them to speak up if they think something is "not quite right." When investigating tragedies like what happened at Stoneman Douglas, authorities usually find that there were warning signs. Our students are not the only ones who can come forward if they have suspicions. You, our community members, can, too.

Our safety protocols are reviewed regularly by our District Safety Team, which consists of district administrators, all of our School Resource Officers, a member of our school board and representatives from our local law enforcement agencies. Over the past few months, I, along with members of my executive team, have been researching new safety initiatives that will be

announced in the coming weeks. We are never “done” with our emergency plan and we will continue to put the safety of our students and staff first.

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